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DARK EMPIRE

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BOOK 5:
EMPEROR REBORN

As the Emperor's World Devastators continue to savage the Alliance, Princess Leia and Han Solo embark on a quest to free Luke Skywalker from the grasp of the Dark Side.

With Chewbacca and C-3PO, Han and Leia journey to an ancient spaceport moon, refuge of Corellian smugglers. There they encounter bounty hunter Boba Fett, who survived being swallowed by the Sarlacc on Tatooine.

Thanks to Han's old friends, *Salla Zend* and *Shug Ninx*, the Millennium Falcon and its crew escape to hyperspace aboard Salla's *Starlight Intruder* – a hot rod freighter licensed to haul military cargo to the Deep Galactic Core.

Boba Fett pursues the *Intruder*, but meets disaster over Byss – the Emperor's throne world – when he attempts to sneak past the planet's security shields.

Once in port, Leia uses her Jedi powers to guide the Millennium Falcon to the citadel where Luke now reigns as the Emperor's protégé. A vicious fight ensues, but according to plan, Ninx and Salla save the Falcon – and Leia, Han, Chewbacca, and C-3PO allow themselves to be captured.

Brought at last into the presence of Emperor Palpatine and his Supreme Commander Luke Skywalker, Leia makes a valiant attempt to save luke, using her intensifying control of the Force.

But the Emperor cannot be overcome so easily. He gives Leia a painful demonstration of his ever-expanding power, crowing in triumph that he has finally captured the last of the Jedi!

YOU'RE A LIFESAVER, LO KHAN--

--THANKS FOR LETTIN' US CONCEAL THE *FALCON* INSIDE *THE HYPERSPACE MARAUDER!*

YOU OWE ME *BIG*, SALLA. IF THE *IMPERIALS* FIND OUT, I'M DEAD MEAT.

YEAH--AND GOLO OWES *ME*. BYSS SECURITY IMPOUNDED *THE STARLIGHT INTRUDER*.

...YOU KNOW HOW *LONG* IT TOOK ME TO BUILD THAT SHIP?

I'LL WAGER A PILE O' GEMS THAT'S A DEBT *YOU'LL* NEVER COLLECT--

--SOLO AND HIS PALS ARE *RANCOR FOOD* BY NOW!

GLIGLLUG KCH AWLKCH!

THAT'S RICH! THE *YAKA'S* SURE GOT A TWISTED SENSE OF HUMOR...WHERE'D YOU TWO HOOK UP, LO KHAN?

KEEP IT TO YOURSELF, BUT **LUWINGO** HERE SAVED MY CAN IN A SHOOTOUT WITH IMPERIALS ON THE GAMOR RUN. I KEEP HIM AROUND FOR **PROTECTION.**

PROTECTION'S EXACTLY WHAT YOU NEED ON **BYSS**-- WHOLE PLACE GIVES ME THE **CREEPS.**

SOLO BETTER SHOW UP...OR I'M TAKIN' THE **FALCON** AND JUMPIN' FOR HOME!

WHAT'S THE DEAL HERE, KHAN? THEY NEVER LET THE **DEEP-CORE** HAULERS DOCK PLANETSIDE BEFORE.

NTAOBH. HCK HK.

IT'S THE MILITARY BUILDUP, SHUG. EVERY PIRATE IN A THOUSAND SYSTEMS IS RUNNIN' SUPPLIES TO THE IMPERIALS. COURSE, YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT...

YEAH...

WAIT-- THAT'S GOTTA BE **SOLO!**

BIP BIP BIP BIP BIP

CHHKLL ULG!

SALLA AND SHUG! HOPE YOU CAN HEAR THIS--OUR **BIG PLAN** ISN'T WORKING OUT LIKE I WANTED.

...HOPE YOU'RE STILL OUT THERE!... HOPE **SOMETHING** IS GOING RIGHT! HERE'S MY COORDINATES--

SOLO... WE COPY!

SOLO? **SOLO?** --I DON'T THINK HE'S RECEIVING.

C'MON, NINX, WE GOT THE **COORDINATES.** LET'S GRAB THE **FALCON** AND RUN THE MAZE AGAIN... BACK TO THE **TOWER.**

MAKE SURE THE PROBES DON'T SEE YA TAKIN' OFF FROM THE **MARAUDER.** THAT SHIP'S ALL LUWINGO AND ME GOT!

WINGO'D BE **HEARTBROKEN** IF SOMETHIN' HAPPENED TO HER!

CHRA GLG ODWOGN!!

LO KHAN'S ON THE BEAM. HE KNOWS *SPACERS* GOTTA STICK TOGETHER IN THIS CRAZY GALAXY!

UH-OH... PROBE'S CHECKIN' OUT THE *MARAUDER!*

THAT AIN'T NO *ORDINARY* PATROL DROID...THAT'S AN IMPERIAL *HUNTER-KILLER!*

JUDGMENT 12-X7 TO SECURITY COMMAND.

FREIGHTER *HYPERSPACE MARAUDER*...DOCKING PERMIT X7A97HM... CARGO SCAN IN PROGRESS.

PLEASE CONFIRM IDENTIFICATION OF *PRIORITY ONE QUARRY.*

PRIORITY ONE QUARRY. CORELLIAN YT-1300 FREIGHTER. IDENTIFICATION: *CONFIRMED*

JUDGMENT 12-X7 TO SECURITY COMMAND... APPREHENSION AND DETAINMENT OF YT-1300 QUARRY IN PROGRESS.

THAT'S THE *LAST* TIME LO KHAN DOES *US* A FAVOR--

S'CLOSIN' ON US *FAST*, SHUG. HIT HIM! HIT HIM!

H-K DROID'S GOT SOME NEW KIND OF *DEFLECTORS*! THE *FALCON'S* MISSILES ARE BOUNCIN' OFF HIS SHIELDS LIKE *PEBBLES*!

LOOKS LIKE HAN AND LEIA WILL HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF BUSINESS WITHOUT US -- AND WITHOUT THE *FALCON*!

HANG ON!

BRAVE LITTLE WARRIOR... I *KNOW* YOUR BROTHER HAS BEEN SABOTAGING MY EFFORTS... HE CAN HIDE *NOTHING* FROM ME.

NO MATTER... EVERYTHING IS AS I *FORESAW* IT... AND EVERYTHING WORKS TOGETHER ACCORDING TO MY PLAN.

YOU ARE DESTINED TO BE *FAR* GREATER THAN HE IS.

MY BROTHER IS A *GREAT JEDI*.

YESS... A GREAT JEDI...

RELEASE HER... AND LEAVE US ALONE. I HAVE *SECRETS* I CAN ONLY SHARE WITH A *JEDI*.

UNH... THE TIME IS APPROACHING... YES, I CAN FEEL IT... WHEN I WILL AGAIN BE *YOUNG*.

COME HERE, LITTLE JEDI. I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING.

THIS IS THE JEDI HOLOCRON... GIVEN TO ME MANY YEARS AGO BY A VERY OLD JEDI... BEFORE HIS... UNTIMELY DEPARTURE.

GO AHEAD. DON'T BE AFRAID.

TAKE IT.

AS PART OF HIS SCHEME TO BEGUILE LEIA, THE EMPEROR HAS RIGHTLY GUESSED THAT HIS NEW APPRENTICE WOULD BE DRAWN TO THE GLOWING JEDI ARTIFACT...

AHH!

SOMETHING ABOUT IT... SO WONDROUS...

...SO FAMILIAR.

YES... IT KNOWS YOU ARE A JEDI.

LEIA FEELS A SUDDEN COMPULSION TO TOUCH THE DESIGNS ON THE STRANGE OBJECT. AS SHE DOES SO, A CURIOUS SOUND FILLS THE AIR...

IT'S... MAGICAL.

NOTHING MAGICAL ABOUT IT, MY DEAR--PRIMITIVE *HOLOGRAM* TECHNOLOGY.

THE OLD JEDI YOU SEE WAS PART OF A GROUP THAT LIVED IN THE *ADEGA SYSTEM* SIX HUNDRED YEARS AGO...

THEY TOOK IT ON THEMSELVES TO MAKE A *RECORD* OF JEDI HISTORY AND TEACHINGS ...FOR THE JEDI OF THE FUTURE...LIKE *YOURSELF.*

OH!

JEDI. HEAR THE WORDS OF *BODD BAAS!*

SOME AMONG US HAVE THOUGHT TO CONQUER THE *DARK SIDE* BY LEARNING ITS *SECRETS...*

THREE TO MY KNOWLEDGE, THREE HAVE TRIED THIS... PERISHED, EVERY ONE OF THEM *PERISHED.*

THIS IS A JEDI TEACHING DEVICE.

YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO THIS.

OH, BUT I DO! AREN'T I THE *MASTER* OF *ALL* THE JEDI?

YOUR OWN *FATHER* WAS MY APPRENTICE!

GIVE ME THE HOLOCRON.

MY FATHER *DIED* BECAUSE OF YOU...AND NOW MY *BROTHER*...

MY BROTHER IS IN GREAT *DANGER*--

YOUR FOOLISH BROTHER HAS CAUSED *ME* GREAT HARM.

LOOK AT ME... I AM ONLY A HELPLESS OLD MAN...

SOON, LIKE *ALL* GREAT JEDI... LIKE YOUR OWN FATHER... I WILL DROP THIS FRAGILE FLESH...

PLEASE... HELP A DYING OLD MAN INTO HIS BED.

STAY WITH ME... SOON YOU WILL SEE...WHAT VERY FEW HAVE SEEN.

THE DARK SIDE HAS GIVEN ME A WONDERFUL POWER... THE POWER TO ENTER ONE OF MY CLONES...

INDEED, I CAN ENTER *ANYONE*...I CAN OVERSHADOW THE SOUL THAT DWELLS THEREIN.

I CAN ENTER...YOUR CHILD--

--THE ONE *THAT IS STIRRING IN YOUR WOMB*.

YESS, LITTLE JEDI... YOUR NEXT CHILD BELONGS TO ME!

NEVER!

UNH... UNH...

I HAVE TESTED HER, AND IT IS EXACTLY AS I HAVE FORESEEN...SHE HAS THE SKYWALKER ANGER... LIKE HER BROTHER... LIKE HER FATHER--

EH? -- WHAT'S THIS? MY HOLOCRON!

GUARDS! GUARDS!

THE JEDI SCUM TOOK MY HOLOCRON!

TELL ME MORE, COMMANDER--

FZZZT

YES, LORD SKYWALKER... THE MASTER CONTROL SIGNAL HAS BEEN *TAMPERED* WITH... BY SOMEONE IN THE COMMAND SECTION.

AS A RESULT WE HAVE LOST *THREE DEVASTATORS*.

HMMM. HAVE YOU INFORMED THE EMPEROR?

I WAS ABOUT TO REPORT IT TO HIM, SIR... BUT HE'S LOCKED IN SECLUSION WITH THE *WOMAN*... YOUR SISTER.

THEN WHY DON'T YOU KEEP THIS INFORMATION TO *YOURSELF*, CAPTAIN... AND IF ANYONE ELSE KNOWS, SEND THEM TO ME AT ONCE.

Y-YESSIR. KEEP IT TO *MYSELF*, SIR.

GOOD. DISMISSED... *BOTH* OF YOU.

OH, MASTER LUKE, LOOK-- IT'S PRINCESS LEIA! THE EMPEROR LET HER GO!

PRINCESS LEIA...TELL MASTER LUKE TO BE CAREFUL! HE'S PUTTING FAR TOO MUCH DATA IN ARTOO'S MEMORY! HE'S ONLY A SIMPLE ASTROMECH DROID, YOU KNOW.

BRRT VWEEP!

AH. LEIA... YOU DID WELL. THE FORCE IS STRONG IN YOU.

LUKE...PLEASE. THE DARK SIDE IS ALL AROUND US.

GET HAN... WE'RE LEAVING... I...I WANT YOU TO COME WITH US.

LEIA!

YOU'VE GOT THE WRONG IDEA! EVERYTHING'S FINE! I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING!

IT'S GOOD THAT YOU CAME TO BYSS...YOUR JEDI POWER, ADDED TO MY OWN, HAS HELPED ME BREAK THE GRIP OF THE DARK SIDE.

I'M NOT SO SURE...I SEE SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENING. I SENSE GREAT DANGER FOR YOU...AND US.

THE EMPEROR IS TOYING WITH YOU, LUKE.

YES, HE MAY THINK SO-- BUT LOOK--HERE'S ARTOO! I'VE HIDDEN THE MASTER CONTROL CODE IN HIS CIRCUITS! AND THE EMPEROR'S PRIORITY BATTLE PLANS!

FREET BDOOT!

LET'S GET HAN AND CHEWIE. WE'LL TAKE A SHIP AND ALL RETURN TO PINNACLE BASE--!

--NOW DO YOU DOUBT ME?

I--I DON'T KNOW...

GUARDS ARE HEADING THIS WAY, LOOKING FOR YOU...MY WORK HERE IS FINISHED...

QUICK--INTO THE ELEVATOR! IT WILL TAKE US TO THE DETENTION FLOOR--TO HAN!

LISTEN, FUR FACE-- IF YOU'D LET ME CUT OFF SOME OF THAT *RUG* YOU'RE WEARING, WE COULD MAKE OURSELVES A *ROPE*... AND GET OUT OF HERE A LOT QUICKER!

NHARRUMN!

C'MON, I AIN'T *THAT* HEAVY! *I'M* THE ONE WHO HAS TO SQUEEZE THROUGH THE HOLE AND DROP TWELVE STORIES--!

TOO BAD SALLA AND SHUG DIDN'T GET MY SIGNAL--

UH-OH-- HOLD IT, PAL... I DON'T THINK THIS IS GONNA WORK.

THERE'S A HUNTER-KILLER DROID *SPYIN'* ON US--

LET ME DOWN--! WE'VE BEEN *NAILED!*

CRAMMED INTO A CRAWLSPACE IN THE H-K'S INNARDS, **SHUG NINX** HAS TAKEN CONTROL OF ALL THE DROID'S CIRCUITS--

OKAY, SALLA! GOT IT HOT-WIRED!

FIRE ONE!

SECONDS LATER A MACHINE PROGRAMMED TO DESTROY AND CAPTURE EXTENDS A CORDIAL **WELCOME** TO THE PRISONERS OF THE EMPIRE--

SALLA!

YOU ALMOST **KILLED** US!

YOU'RE **FREE**, AREN'T YOU?

THAT'S **TWO** YOU OWE YOUR OLD GIRLFRIEND, SOLO!

QUICK! GET ON BOARD! WE'VE GOT THE *FALCON*--!

PLANET SECURITY *KNOWS* WE STOLE ONE OF THEIR HUNTER-KILLER DROIDS!

NNHARRUUNN!

HOLD IT, CHEWIE! TA HECK WITH THE *FALCON!* WE AREN'T LEAVIN' 'TIL WE FIND *LEIA!*

SUDDENLY SOLO HEARS THE VOICE OF AN OLD FRIEND--

HAN.

IT'S THE *TRAITOR!*

THROW ME A BLASTER, SALLA!

OKAY, FARM BOY-- DO YOU WANT IT NOW OR LATER?

WHERE'S MY *WIFE?*

HAN! STOP! IT'S OVER!

OUTTA MY WAY, LEIA--THE *DARK SIDE* HAS GOT HIM! HE'S LIABLE TO DO *ANYTHING!*

NO, HAN... WE'RE ALL LEAVING... *TOGETHER.* LUKE HAS THE *CODE* WE NEED TO STOP THE DEVASTATORS!

HAN-- *LISTEN* TO LEIA!

IF WHAT I'M DOING SUCCEEDS, THE EMPIRE WILL BE FINISHED... *FOREVER.*

OKAY-- IF YOU'RE TELLIN' THE TRUTH, WHY DON'T WE TAKE OUT THE EMPEROR *RIGHT NOW*... AS LONG AS WE'RE IN TOWN.

SECURITY PATROL!

C'MON, SOLO! CUT THE GAB! LET'S *MOVE!*

AS THE REBELS SCRAMBLE FOR THE H-K'S DETAINMENT HOLD, *SHUG NINX* TURNS THE BIG DROID'S ATTACK SYSTEMS AGAINST THE EMPEROR'S SECURITY PATROL--

TAKE US UP, NINX! WE'VE GOT EVERYTHING WE CAME FOR!

BUT THE MOMENT THE PATROL SPEEDER BLOWS, SHUG FINDS HIMSELF IN A FURIOUS *FIRE-FIGHT* WITH THE TOWER GUNS--

RENEGADE PROBE DROID!

DESTROY IT!

HOPELESSLY OUTGUNNED, SHUG SETS THE H-K ON *AUTOFIRE* AND JOINS THE RETREAT...

FIRE UP THE *FALCON*, SOLO! THIS PROBE DROID IS GONNA BE HISTORY!

THE *MILLENNIUM FALCON* BLASTS TO FREEDOM--JUST AS THE TOWER TURBOLASERS FIND THEIR MARK!

OKAY, CHEWIE-- GET READY FOR *LIGHT SPEED!*

WHUUARRN!

RISKING HIGH ATMOSPHERE BURN-UP, SOLO THROWS THE *FALCON* INTO LIGHT DRIVE JUST IN TIME TO AVOID COLLISION WITH THE PLANET'S SHIELD PERIMETER--

--THEN, ONCE SAFELY IN HYPERSPACE, THE REUNITED HEROES GATHER TO HEAR LUKE'S INSTRUCTIONS.

SO EVERYTHING THE REBELS NEED TO *BEAT* THESE DEVASTATORS IS INSIDE OLD ARTOO, HUH?

YES. TAKE ARTOO AND PLUG HIM INTO YOUR HYPERSPACE COMM SYSTEM.

HE'LL HELP YOU BEAM *INTERFERENCE* CODES TO THE WORLD DEVASTATORS... EVEN WHILE YOU'RE IN HYPERSPACE.

VWEE-DOOT!

THAT'S GREAT. WHY DON'T *YOU* SHOW US...OR MAYBE YOU'VE GOT A LITTLE *SURPRISE* PLANNED!

I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY YOU STILL DON'T TRUST ME, HAN...

BUT NOW THAT YOU ARE ALL SAFELY AWAY FROM BYSS, I HAVE *OTHER* WORK TO DO.

IF I FAIL IN THE TASK I MUST NOW ACCOMPLISH, THE ALLIANCE MUST BE PREPARED TO FIGHT ITS GREATEST BATTLE!

HUH? WHAT ARE YOU TALKIN' ABOUT?

VERY SIMPLE...

I'M STILL ON BYSS.

HE'S GONE. HOW--?

HE USED A *DARK-SIDE POWER* TO TRICK US. HE KNEW I'D NEVER WILLINGLY LEAVE HIM ON BYSS.

HE DID IT TO SAVE OUR *CHILD* FROM THE EMPEROR, HAN.

UH... WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? THE KIDS ARE SAFE ON *NEW ALDERAAN!*

THERE'S NO POINT IN GOING BACK FOR LUKE. WE'LL NEVER GET NEAR HIM NOW.

BUT I FEAR FOR MY BROTHER...

HE'S IGNORED THE WARNINGS OF HIS TEACHERS... HE *KNOWS* THE PATH HE'S TAKING LEADS TO *DESTRUCTION.*

SKYWALKER...

I SENSE YOUR PRESENCE... HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE?

THE CLONE LAB IS SEALED... MY MOMENT OF TRANSFERENCE IS CLOSE... NO ONE IS ALLOWED IN HERE NOW.

I HAVE COME TO PREVENT THAT TRANSITION.

LET ME OFFER YOU A BARGAIN, MY FRIEND... I WILL KILL YOU NOW... OR YOU CAN PERMIT ME TO MOVE INTO YOUR BODY.

THEN YOU AND I WILL RULE THE UNIVERSE... AS ONE.

YES... SO YOU HAVE... USING THE POWERS I HAVE GIVEN YOU.

I'VE LEARNED MANY OF YOUR SECRETS, YOUR MAJESTY. YOUR POWER OVER ME IS BROKEN. WHEN I DESTROY YOUR CLONES, YOUR REIGN WILL BE AT AN END.

VERY WELL...

THEN I MUST DIE!

REALIZING THE EMPEROR CAN ONLY TRANSFER HIS CONSCIOUSNESS TO A LIVING BODY, LUKE LUNGES FOR THE NEAREST CLONE VAT.

ONE AFTER ANOTHER THE RUPTURED TANKS SPILL THEIR MEMBRANE-SHROUDED CONTENTS--

--ONE AFTER ANOTHER THE EMPEROR'S GENETIC OFFSPRING MEET MINDLESS, BABBLING DEATH...

ALL EXCEPT *ONE.*

TOO LATE, SKYWALKER.

TOO LATE.

DID YOU **REALLY** THINK YOU COULD CONQUER ME BY COMING HERE TO MY THRONE-WORLD?

YOU FORGET-- I AM A JEDI MASTER NOW... AND I KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THE *DARK SIDE*.

DOES YOUR DARK-SIDE KNOWLEDGE TELL YOU HOW MANY OTHER SO-CALLED "JEDI MASTERS" FAILED TO VANQUISH ME?

DOES YOUR KNOWLEDGE TELL YOU--

--THAT I HAVE *ALREADY* BEATEN YOU?

POOR JEDI-- YOUR KIND WILL SOON BE *EXTINCT.*

AND HOW FITTING THAT ONE OF THEIR PRECIOUS *LIGHTSABERS* BRINGS AN *END* TO THE JEDI DELUSION!

GATHERING STRENGTH MOMENT BY MOMENT, THE *YOUNG EMPEROR* LASHES OUT WITH THE JEDI WEAPON--PUSHING HIS ELDER ADVERSARY TO THE LIMIT!

DRAWING ON ALL HIS RESOURCES, LUKE PARRIES THE EMPEROR'S LETHAL BLOWS...

YOU HAVE FILLED THE *GALAXY* WITH YOUR DARKNESS... BUT I HAVE SEEN WHAT MY FATHER COULD NOT SEE...

I HAVE SEEN THAT ULTIMATELY THE DARK SIDE WILL *FAIL!*

JEDI FOOL... IN SPITE OF THE *STORIES* YOU TELL YOURSELF, *I* AM THE STRONGER... DID I NOT *WARN* YOU?

NOW TAKE THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR FAILURE--LIKE YOUR FATHER BEFORE YOU!

NO, SKYWALKER... IT IS NOT YOUR TIME TO DIE.

IT IS YOUR TIME TO SUBMIT. THE DARK SIDE WILL BREAK YOU!

NOW GET UP... WE ARE GOING TO FIND YOUR SISTER!

I WANT MY HOLOCRON...AND I WANT YOUR SISTER'S CHILD! I AM GOING TO CRUSH THE REBELLION ONCE AND FOR ALL!

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